
Preface

In March 2008 the Human Rights Unit held a one-off event, with support from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), on the new Universal Periodic Review process of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). At this two-day seminar, representatives of the first three Commonwealth states to undergo UPR were invited to share their experiences with those still to be reviewed in that year, and the UN was invited to share the aims and workings of the new process. The contribution of stakeholders to the UPR is central and therefore NHRIs and NGOs were invited to participate in the discussions.

UPR experts from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) were at the seminar and were central to the discussions. They shared information on the process itself and were able to deal with the many queries raised by states and stakeholders. For many Commonwealth small states, the absence of a mission in Geneva renders them outsiders in the debates and discussions there on the experiences and assessments of new developments.

Feedback from participants suggests that information sharing and exploration of others' experience has been particularly supportive in their preparations. Continued FCO support has enabled HRU to hold further preparatory workshops. In the period up to October 2010, the HRU organised or was involved in eight UPR preparatory workshops (including a mid-term review) during the first two years of the four-year process, together with HRU observation of member states' reviews in Geneva and a publication that reviewed the first year of the process. The three streams of our UPR work – seminars, observations and analysis of the Geneva element – inform the content of this publication. It is intended to be a tool for states and stakeholders that have been through or are about to enter the UPR process – by pooling experiences, critiques and responses, as well as positive impacts. Additionally, a summary of key points from this publication have been shared with the Human Rights Council (HRC), which began its review of its architecture and mechanisms on human rights, including the UPR, in late 2010. The HRC review has now concluded and a one page summary is included in the back.

This publication offers an overall positive assessment of the potential of the process to prompt and support change in-country. It also acknowledges and supports the willingness of states to participate in international discussions on human rights to the betterment of their own efforts back home. The second half of the book presents the mid-way analysis and hopes that were shared at the mid-term review held in March 2010.

Finally, a set of data is included that presents information on various aspects of the Geneva dialogue. A commentary accompanies the data.

Thanks are due to many people – this work has rested and grown on the efforts and thoughts of numerous colleagues and organisations. I thank the participants in the many workshops who have come to know the UPR and to seek the best in this mechanism for the benefit of the people for whom they work. I thank also the resource persons who have given most generously of their time. The UPR team in the UN High Commissioner's Office in Geneva deserve special mention; they have been with us at each event and made key contributions towards sharing information on UPR and building the confidence to participate. They have also co-funded some of the events, for which the HRU is particularly appreciative. New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has also contributed funds to the work, supporting the attendance of NGOs at one of the regional events. The FCO has supported this project from the start. Their support and their ongoing engagement is deeply appreciated.

Dr Purna Sen

Head of Human Rights

Commonwealth Secretariat